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INTERNATIONAL FISHING ACTIVITIES IN WESTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA, 1964[1/]

The west coast of the African continent extends almost 7000 miles from Tangier to Cape Town, and includes some 18 nations. In recent years, interest in the fisheries of this area -both on the part of the African countries themselves and many non-African nations- has developed rapidly, indeed almost spectacularly. This report will attempt to summarize the nature and extent of this interest.

Fisheries of the West African area in which foreign vessels have taken part most prominently fall into two broad categories: (1) the trawl fishery for various species of bottom fish, and (2) the tuna fishery. These will be discussed separately, as follows:

The Trawl Fishery

Starting at the northern end of the coast, a considerable amount of foreign fishing activity is found off Mauretania. For several years these waters are estimated to be yielding about 250,000 tons of fish annually, of which only 15,000 tons a year are landed in Mauretania. However, this 15,000 ton figure is expected to be increased greatly starting in early 1965 as two new processing and freezing plants at Port-Etienne are completed. In 1963, the following countries were represented in waters off Mauretania:

Spain —80 old trawlers, not refrigerated
Portugal —45 old 40-meter trawlers, not refrigerated
Greece —22 refrigerated trawlers, taking average 300 tons per year per vessel.
Italy —50 vessels
Poland —10 vessels
Russia —Some 80 factory ships and trawlers operating in waters between Morrocco and Nigeria.
Israel —2 vessels
Japan —Varying numbers of trawlers seasonally.

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1/Information supplied by United States Embassy, Abidjan, Ivory Coast.
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A fisheries treaty signed in February 1964 between Mauretania and Spain is expected to have a major effect on the development of Mauretania's fisheries. The major provisions of this treaty are as follows:

The 50-year treaty attempts to regulate the difficulties that have arisen between Spain and Mauretania since the latter's independence over the traditional use of Mauretanian territorial waters by Canary-Islands-based Spanish fishermen. It gives Spain the right to fish in Mauretanian waters under the same conditions as Mauretanian nationals, in return for sizable Spanish investments in fish processing facilities at Port-Etienne, and the right of free repatriation of profits from such industries.

Specifically, Spain guarantees: (1) to build and operate a salting and drying works within 18 months with an annual capacity of 6000 tons; and within 24 months, a cannery with an annual capacity of 3000 tons, and a fish meal factory capable of treating 100 tons of fresh fish daily; (2) to document 20 to 50 Spanish fishing vessels under Mauritanian registry, subject to Mauritanian laws; (3) for Spanish vessels fishing Mauritanian waters, to pay an annual royalty of $ 10 per gross ton; (4) train Mauritanian commercial fishermen in Spanish schools and as crewmen aboard Spanish vessels fishing Mauritanian waters.

In addition to permitting the use of Mauritanian waters and repatriation of profits, Mauritania agrees to: (1) grant Spanish fisheries enterprises most-favored-nation administrative, customs, and tax treatment; (2) make available the necessary construction sites for the projected industrial establishments; and (3) to reserve to Spanish fishermen the necessary storage space in the projected refrigeration facilities at Port Etienne for the fish unutilized in 15 days' operations in the canning and fish meal plants.

In Senegal there is a small trawler fleet of some 20 French vessels based at Dakar. However, it is estimated that from 12 to 50 Russian trawlers frequently fish in the coastal waters off Senegal, plus some 40 Japanese vessels during the summer months. Groups of Spanish and Portuguese vessels have also been noted in the area.

The coastal waters of Guinea enjoy a comparatively wide continental shelf, extending as much as 75 miles at some points, and are rich in fishery resources. In the spring of 1964 the Government of Guinea declared its territorial waters to extend to 130 miles from its coast, and has set a licensing arrangement by which foreign vessels are permitted to fish in Guinean waters by prior authorization and payment of a tax. As far as can be determined, a French trawler is the only one so far to request and receive such authorization. This vessel is currently fishing in Guinean waters and using the port facilities of Conakry.

In Sierra Leone a trawl-fish operation was started in the middle of 1964 by a company composed of local interests, a Danish firm, and interests in Liberia and Nigeria. An estimated 500 tons a month of frozen-at-sea fish is landed at Freetown by two Japanese carrier boats working with a fleet of 20 Japanese trawlers. There are 4 cold store depots located at population centers throughout Sierra Leone, and the fish is distributed to these points by a fleet of 10 insulated trucks.

In 1963 a similar operation was started by an affiliated company in Liberia. Here the fish are supplied by 6 Japanese trawlers under charter to the Liberian company and distribution is made from Monrovia to 7 cold store depots in various cities inland. About 700 tons a month is presently being distributed in this manner.

Although Ghana's fisheries are rapidly becoming totally nationalized, as of last reports there were still landings being made by other than Government-owned vessels. These include 10 Russian trawlers, 5 Japanese trawlers, and 2 Polish trawlers. An additional 10 trawlers are on order from Norway, Japan, and the United Kingdom, but these are to be Ghana-owned.

In Togo, Dahomey, and Nigeria both Russian and Japanese deep-sea trawlers are landing increasing quantities of frozen-at-sea fish. Two Japanese companies are operating three vessels each in this fishery, while the number of Russian vessels is estimated at six to eight.

In both Cameroun and Gabon arrangements were being made in August 1964 for landings of frozen-at-sea fish by Japanese trawlers. For a few months early in 1964 two Nationalist Chinese trawlers operated out of Douala, Cameroun, in a training effort in cooperation with the Cameroun Government. This operation ended, however, in June.

In the waters off the coast of Angola there are estimated to be an average of some 8 to 10 Belgian trawlers, about 15 Japanese vessels, and some 20 Russian trawlers normally fishing. During 1963, a Japanese factory ship was based at Luanda accepting trawl fish from the local fleet for processing and freezing. This was a trial operation, with the hope that the Japanese would invest in a permanent shore-based processing and freezing plant. Since this did not materialize, the factoryship operation was stopped.

In addition to the substantial fleet of South and South West African trawlers fishing off the coast of South and South West Africa, there is known to be a large fleet of foreign vessels. These include up to 24 Russian trawlers, about a dozen Spanish trawlers, various numbers of French, Belgian and Portuguese boats, and a fleet of some 70 Japanese vessels. The latter, however, comprised more tuna boats than trawlers. The trawlers (all modern stern trawlers) fished largely on the Agulhas Banks, east of Cape Point and therefore not in West African waters. In this fishery they are thought to have taken some 25,000 tons of fish in 1962.

To summarize the extent of the foreign-operated trawl fishery in these waters, there is given below a table showing the estimated number of trawlers presently operating in western and southern Africa. The absence of the United States flag is to be noted.

TABLE 1

Estimated number of Foreign Trawlers Regularly Fishing off the Coasts of some West African Countries

Flag of Vessel

African Country	Russia	Japan §	Spain §	France §	Belgium	Portugal	Greece	Italy
Mauretania	80		80			45	22	50
Senegal	30	40	20			20		
Guinea		20		1				
Sierra-Leone		20						
Liberia		6						
Ivory Coast				20				
Ghana	10	5						
Togo, Dahomey & Nigeria	8	6	3	9				
Angola	20	18			8	6		
South West & South Africa	18		12	6	8	6		

§ Note: These fleets range the coast freely and appear at various locations during the year. The figures should not be added together.

The table below gives an estimate of the annual catch (for 1963) of the foreign-operated trawl fishery in western and southern Africa. It should be noted that this fishery is really only in its infancy, is rapidly expanding, and the coast line involved is almost 7000 miles in length. Although the continental shelf is very narrow in some parts of this coast, there is a growing tendency for the larger offshore trawlers to fish deep - 300 fathoms being now not uncommon. This is particularly true in the waters from Angola south. It is almost a certainty, therefore, that the next two or three years will see a substantial increase in catch.

TABLE 2

Estimates of Trawl Catch by Foreign-Operated Vessels in Western and Southern Africa (1963)

Country	Principal Foreign Flags	Estimated Catch (metric tons)
Mauretania	Russia, Spain, Portugal	250,000
Sierra Leone	Japan	2,000
Liberia	Japan	7,000
Nigeria	Japan, Russia	7,000
South Africa (incl. SW Africa)	Russia, Spain	80,000

Note 1. In the case of Sierra-Leone, Liberia and Nigeria, the above figures represent landings of trawl-caught frozen-at-sea fish. In the case of Mauretania and South Africa the figures represent estimates of catch, almost all of which is not landed in the country concerned. To these figures should be added an undetermined tonnage of fish processed and frozen aboard and taken directly to Russia, Poland, Japan, etc.

Note 2. According to a report by the Japanese Fisheries Agency, 34 Japanese trawlers operating in west African waters produced a total of 92,000 metric tons of bottomfish in 1963. This consisted of 39,000 tons of sea bream, 18,000 tons of "monko" squid, 7,000 tons of octopus, and 28,000 tons of miscellaneous fish (including mackerel and "merluza"). Of that total, 38,300 metric tons were exported to European and African countries, as follows: Ghana 11,500; Italy 5,500; Nigeria 5,500; Greece 4,000; Spain 3,500; others (including Rumania, Liberia and Sierra Leone) 8,300.

The Tuna Fishery

The tuna fishery in western and southern Africa is dominated almost entirely by foreign flags. Most prominent among these is Japan, followed by Spain, France and Portugal. Again, the U.S. flag is totally absent. The nearest thing to U.S. vessel participation was the arrival in late 1963 of two U.S. tuna clippers in west African waters. These bait boats, of about 80 tons capacity each and with Ecuadorean crews attempted some fishing with very little success. A combination of ill-fated circumstances resulted in both vessels being sold to local interests early in 1964. Neither has resumed fishing operations as yet.

U.S. participation in the tuna fishery is at present, however, in the form of transshipping operation at the following six locations:

Dakar, Senegal
Freetown, Sierra-Leone
Monrovia, Liberia
Abidjan, Ivory Coast
Accra, Ghana
Pointe-Noire, Congo-Brazzaville

In addition to these points, some tuna is also landed at ports in Morocco, Angola, South West Africa and South Africa for canning or transshipping purposes.

Since a more complete report on the tuna fishery of western and southern Africa was prepared previously, the present report will confine itself to a summary of foreign-flag vessels engaged in tuna fishery, as follows:

TABLE 3

Foreign-Flag Vessels in Western & Southern Africa Tuna Fishery (1964)

Country	Japan	Spain	France
Senegal			84
Sierra Leone	6	34	
Liberia	6	14	
Ivory Coast	13	4	
Ghana	14		
Congo-Brazzaville	6	6	15

Note: As in Table 1 above, these figures should not be totalled, since both Japanese and Spanish vessels may land tuna at the port most convenient at the time.

As can be seen from the above, joint fishing operations are widespread throughout western and southern Africa. In all cases use of port facilities is extended to the foreign-flag vessels. These include fuel, ice where used, provisions, water, and repair facilities as they may be available. Freezing and cold storage facilities, which exist in some degree in almost all ports involved, are also commonly used.

In the case of the six tuna transshipping activities listed above, the joint operation consists of a shore-based company usually composed of local, European, and U.S. interests working with Japanese, Spanish and/or French vessels supplying the tuna. Local representatives of the Japanese companies involved are normally resident at the port, and full support services are provided. Japanese practice has recently been to rotate their vessels back to Japan every two years, and their crews are now being rotated by air transport every year.

Ghana's joint fishing operations involve close ties with Russia in the form of vessel construction, operation, and training of Ghanaian fishermen. Several agreements have been signed within the past two years calling for the construction in Russia of a number of large offshore refrigerated trawlers, the training of crews in Russia in actual fishing, and the construction of shore facilities. In addition to this, Ghana has also entered into agreements with Norway and Japan for training of Ghanaian fishermen.

In the countries in which Japanese and Russian vessels have recently begun to land frozen fish (Sierra Leone, Liberia, Togo, Dahomey, Nigeria, Cameroun, Gabon), the tie is not as close. Relations are for the most part limited to the purchase of the frozen fish and the necessities of fuel, water, and provisions.

In South Africa, a recently commenced operation involves a fleet of large Spanish trawlers landing their catch frozen at Cape Town for transshipment to Spain. Contract arrangements have been made for freezer storage space with a Cape Town freezer, and shore support is provided to vessels.

Attitude of African Governments

Among the many African nations along the coastline of West and south Africa there are, naturally, varying viewpoints on the matter of foreign vessels fishing off their shores. These range from an attitude of acceptance of the fact that the indigenous fisheries are not yet capable of supplying the protein needs of the country and the government is therefore glad to accept foreign-caught fish - to an attitude of jealously guarding the local fishery resources for future development by the country's own efforts. In the case of Guinea, this has been carried to the extent of claiming territorial waters far in excess (130 miles) of any reasonable definition by accepted international practice.

In general, none of the countries is happy about foreign vessels fishing just outside their territorial waters. On the other hand, most of them recognize that there is not much they can do about it, except perhaps to develop their own fishing fleet to the point of being able to successfully carry on an offshore fishery. In Togo, for example, the government recently extended its claimed territorial waters to 12 miles and has accepted a German aid project which will see delivery of two trawlers about October 1965, when the new port development has provided sufficient anchorage. The Togolese government is also considering increasing taxes on imported fish to favor the Togolese fisherman.

In Nigeria, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, Togo, Sierra Leone, and Senegal, responses to a recent inquiry by a U.S. firm regarding possible exploratory fishing and the establishment of a fishery for shrimp and other species have all indicated a definite interest in such a project. A willingness to cooperate fully in such a joint venture was expressed by each of these countries.

Summary

The waters off western and southern Africa - now recognized to be literally teeming with fish - lay practically virgin for centuries. Only three short years ago fishing nations of the world awoke to the potential riches to be harvested from these waters, and now we are witnessing a surge of activity and development rarely equalled in fisheries history. Led by Japan and Russia, and participated in by a half dozen other nations, this development is largely being spearheaded by non-African countries. South Africa, including South West Africa, where the fisheries have been carefully and efficiently developed over the past fifteen years, is an exception to this.

Distribution of seafoods taken from west and south African waters has so far been as follows:

1. Local consumption - moderate quantities of sardinella and miscellaneous species, often smoked, dried, or both.

2. Export to African countries - examples are dried and salted fish from Mauretania to Cameroun and the Congos; canned pilchards from Congo-Brazzaville to the Central African countries; and canned sardines from Morocco to Ivory Coast and Madagascar.

3. Direct export home - such as Russian, Spanish and Japanese vessels carrying their frozen catch to their home country.

4. Export to non-African countries - so far confined to South and South West African exports of canned fish, fish meal and oil, and frozen lobster tails; Angolan exports of fish meal and oil and canned fish; Ivory Coast exports of canned tuna; Senegal's exports of canned tuna; and Morocco's exports of fish meal and oil and canned fish.

While the continental shelf along this coast is rather narrow for the most part, certain areas are rich in fish. The report of the recently completed Guinean trawling survey, soon to be released, will shed much-needed light on the extent of the stocks of demersal fish. Recent work in deep-water trawling up to 300 or more fathoms indicates great promise for this type of fishing, thus opening up grounds going considerably beyond the traditional continental shelf limits. Experience in pelagic fisheries so far indicates abundant stocks, particularly of tuna and sardinella. Research work now underway and to be undertaken shortly will provide needed information on the nature and extent of these resources.

Much remains to be done in the field of fisheries in this part of the world. Although the African countries will participate as rapidly and fully as their resources and ability permit, the impetus, the knowledge, and the finances will continue to come from non-African sources for some years ahead. It can truly be said that we are at the threshold of what must inevitably be major fishery development in the next few years.